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ABSTRACT

The Novice Debate Association (NDA) is an organization that is building unity, respecting diversity, and giving students and institutions alike a chance to participate in debate activity. The NDA began in 1987 as a strictly novice tournament. By 1993, the association had enlarged to 24 colleges and universities. The format of the NDA is designed to stimulate debate participation especially for those students and programs that might not have an equal opportunity to participate on the "debate circuit." There are three tournaments per year, and the topic for debate is the corresponding CEDA (Cross Examination Debate Association) topic for the semester. The shared understanding of the organization's purpose is an overriding unification of the group's members. The NDA existence revolves around the idea that speakers should use communication skills that would also be appropriate in a public forum. The premise that NDA is "breaking new ground" in debate serves as a unification device to its members. Diversity in the NDA comes in many forms. Many of the participants in NDA tournaments come directly from classrooms, and they are afforded an experience that many students interested in the activity do not get. If the field of competitive debate is to expand, especially in CEDA, more work in the creation of unity and diversity is necessary. (RS)

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A Novice and Novel Approach To Encouraging Participation In Debate, The Novice Debate Association.

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A Novice and Novel Approach to Encouraging Participation in Debate, The Novice Debate Association

In a time of decreasing debate budgets and program elimination there are fewer and fewer opportunities to give students an outlet to competitive debate. Participation in debate (especially CEDA debate) is becoming more and more competitive. Often times, budget allocation is dependent upon the verifiable success of the debate program. More beginning or novice students are being left behind as the debate arena becomes more competitive. Larry Underberg and Gary Horn state, "There are two persistent problems faced by many debate coaches. First, how can debate be made accessible to students, particularly those in communication classes, when the increasing level of competitive intensity in novice divisions at traditional tournaments makes participation for "first timers" grueling at best and completely demoralizing at worst? Second, can an environment refining advocacy skills that will serve the participant "outside" the narrow confines of the tournament setting and less focused on the accumulation of trophies be created?"1 The Novice Debate Association (NDA) attempts to address these issues. As the NDA focuses upon these aspects both unity and diversity are being created. This paper will evaluate the NDA's effect upon diversity and unity in debate.

The History of the Novice Debate Association

"In the spring of 1987 at Otterbein University's tournament several coaches expressed their concern over the general lack of "safe debate" competition for novices. . . . The coaches agreed that in order to foster "safe debate" for novices it would require mutual support from other coaches and a supportive environment which placed the really new debaters on an equal footing."2 Later that spring Gary Horn of Ferris State University, Larry Underberg of Manchester College, and John Lama of Hillsdale College participated in a strict novice tournament. This was the basic beginning of the NDA. Word spread within the region about the successful tournament and further support was given the infant group. In its infancy the association was termed the Tri-State Debate Association because of the members were from Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio. As the the organization grew by 1990 a constitution was ratified and the name changed to the Novice Debate Association as participation in the association had grown outside of the three state area. In the fall of 1990 the association had enlarged to twelve schools. Regional support of the organization and its purposes spread. Currently, the membership is totals 24 colleges and universities.

Objective of the Organization

In understanding the relationship of the organization and its building of unity and diversity one must first understand the organization's purpose. The NDA constitution states "the primary objectives of this association shall be to encourage novice level competition in CEDA debate through: a) The establishment and support of novice debate tournaments which allow participation in a competitive environment that is nonthreatening, supportive, and competitively balanced. b) The provision of a mutual support network designed to promote debate participation and assist with program development in member states."3 The NDA focus of debate is of a practical activity to stimulate debate participation especially for those students and programs that might not have an equal opportunity to participate on the "debate circuit".

Tournament Procedure

There are three tournaments per year. The topic for debate is the corresponding CEDA topic for the semester. There are no fees for entering teams. The only fees charged by the organization is an annual $25.00 per member institution. Host schools are expected to absorb the cost of tournament administration. The first semester tournament(s) is not sanctioned by CEDA to allow schools to participate in the

spring sweepstakes championship. Judging is done by coaches, hired judges, and varsity debaters. To be eligible a team may not have seven debate rounds of experience in either high school or college. The tournament will be four rounds and completed in one day. Awards will be given to the top teams and speakers in the "never debated before" category and best overall team and speaker. All participants in an NDA tournament receive acknowledgement for the association.

The Novice Debate Association and Building Unity

The Association has created a unified organization based upon the standards set forth in the constitution. Developed by the Constitution and the "founding fathers" participation in this organization is limited to students whom are relatively or completely new to the activity. This concept is the driving force behind the organization. The shared understanding of the organization's purpose is an overriding unification of the group's members. A unified belief in giving new students a chance to debate on an equal competitive level binds this organization. The very purpose of the organization unifies the members in keeping a novice division just that. This feeling reinforces a need to keep the competitive level in the novice division at a minimum. This shared attitude is building a consensus on the importance of this organization.

Another unifying aspect of this organization is the shared

stylistic concerns of the organization. The focus of style as expressed by the Constitution is that debaters should mirror both stylistically and analytically the skills required in other public forums. The NDA existence revolves around the idea that speakers should use communication skills that would also be appropriate in a public forum. Much of the CEDA debate community frowns upon the "buffalo" approach to debate. More and more evidence use and rapid speed are necessary to be nationally competitive. The organization rallies around the idea that debate should be an educational service in which students can use the same skills practiced in a tournament so they can use the same skills in the "real world". To fulfill this stylistic expectation members must be firm in their particular belief of what the activity is designated to do in this situation. A unified membership is essential to the participation in the Novice Debate Association.

Horn and Underberg add another unifying event of the NDA. ". . . an unanticipated benefit of the NDA style tournament . . . is a sense of collegiality has developed among program directors due in part to their shared commitment and reinforced by their interaction at the tournament during frequent off rounds." 4 One of the first premises to unity is understanding each other. Program directors have time to discuss and analyze debate and the organization at the tournaments. Within this discourse the directors share their attitudes about debate. This open discourse has an unifying

effect upon the members. Unlike many "regular" tournaments directors have an opportunity to talk to each other and discuss concerns they may have with the activity. The open communication or opportunity for communication allows for the understanding and development of the activity.

Another line of communication that the NDA offers to build unity in the organization is the newsletter. Directors and students alike are encouraged to express any idea about the organization they may have. Even if directors cannot attend tournaments they can freely communicate with each other through the newsletter. As the newsletter is specific to the NDA, members can remain current on important events that are specific to the organization or the directors and their programs that are attributed to the NDA.

The final aspect of unity I will cover is that the NDA is an unique concept. The premise that the NDA is "breaking new ground" in debate serves as a unification device to its members. To know and understand that this application of debate is specific to this association gives the members a sense of being special. This feeling of being a member of an unique organization builds unity within it. To know the member schools are responsible only to a small amount of colleagues enhances the air of being dedicated to the ideals set forth by the NDA. The NDA is fairly a regional organization and it sets a regional precedence in the CEDA community. In an organization like CEDA, there are many diverse views of what debate should and should not be.

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Sharing the ideas of the NDA also serves to unite the members of how debate should be performed in the larger association. The origination and growth of the activity shows that there was a feeling that "national tournaments" were not a suitable situation to enter new debaters into. The establishment and support of this association shows there is a firm attitude that a different setting was necessary to start new debaters in the activity. The NDA is not an us against them statement but rather a setting in which the members are comfortable with the debate environment and are supportive of its goals.

The NDA and Respecting Diversity

Diversity in the NDA comes in many forms. New students and new debate institutions are at the heart of diversity in the NDA. The NDA offers all interested a forum for active debate participation.

Without the NDA, many students would not have the opportunity to gain valuable experience in debate. Many of the participants come directly from classrooms, and they are afforded an experience that many students whom are interested in the activity do not get. Some members enjoy the activity and begin participating with the "regular" debate squad. Others may not join the debate team but have had the debate experience in the worst case scenario. Increasing student involvement in the activity also increases the diversity of the students that participate. Presenting this opportunity

gives more students a chance to participate. Without the NDA many students could not or would not participate. Many students believe that if they do not have high school debate experience they cannot compete at the collegiate level. NDA helps to foster new students into the activity. These students, who are not associated with a topic or team, often times present the most diverse argumentation. As these students are not exposed to the "standard argumentation" of regular debate travel, it is necessary for them to present and evaluate what to them is new argumentation. From this fresh exposure to the argumentation the students must present argumentation which may not be the standard response to that situation. Therefore, not only are new participants adding to the diversity of the activity but their argumentation does as well.

The NDA presents a format to encourage participation from institutions that may not have existing debate programs. Part of the NDA philosophy states, "The provision of a mutual support network designed to promote debate participation and assist with program development in member states."5 Not only does this reinforce the idea of unity but it supports the participation of a diverse group of schools. There are a number of schools who do not have the budget to face the rigors of debate team travel but who want to participate. The NDA offers an outlet for these colleges and universities. An area of concern for the organization is that it is "taking away" from the Cross Examination Debate Association. The

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organization is unique and does make statements concerning style and purpose. These statements can be interpreted as limiting diversity rather than expanding or stabilizing diversity. Horn and Underberg address this issue, "We believe that the NDA experience should be a supplement, not replace, the "traditional" tournament experience. We are aware that our vision of the activity is one of many possible outlooks to attract students to CEDA debate. Nonetheless, the approach has proven quite successful in cultivating student and institutional interest in competitive debate while fostering a climate of mutual respect and support that has yielded substantial benefits." 6

The Novice Debate Association is an organization that is building unity and respecting diversity. The NDA is giving students and institutions alike a chance to participate in the debate activity. If the field of competitive debate is to expand, especially in CEDA, more work in the creation of unity and diversity is necessary.

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4. Horn and Underberg.

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